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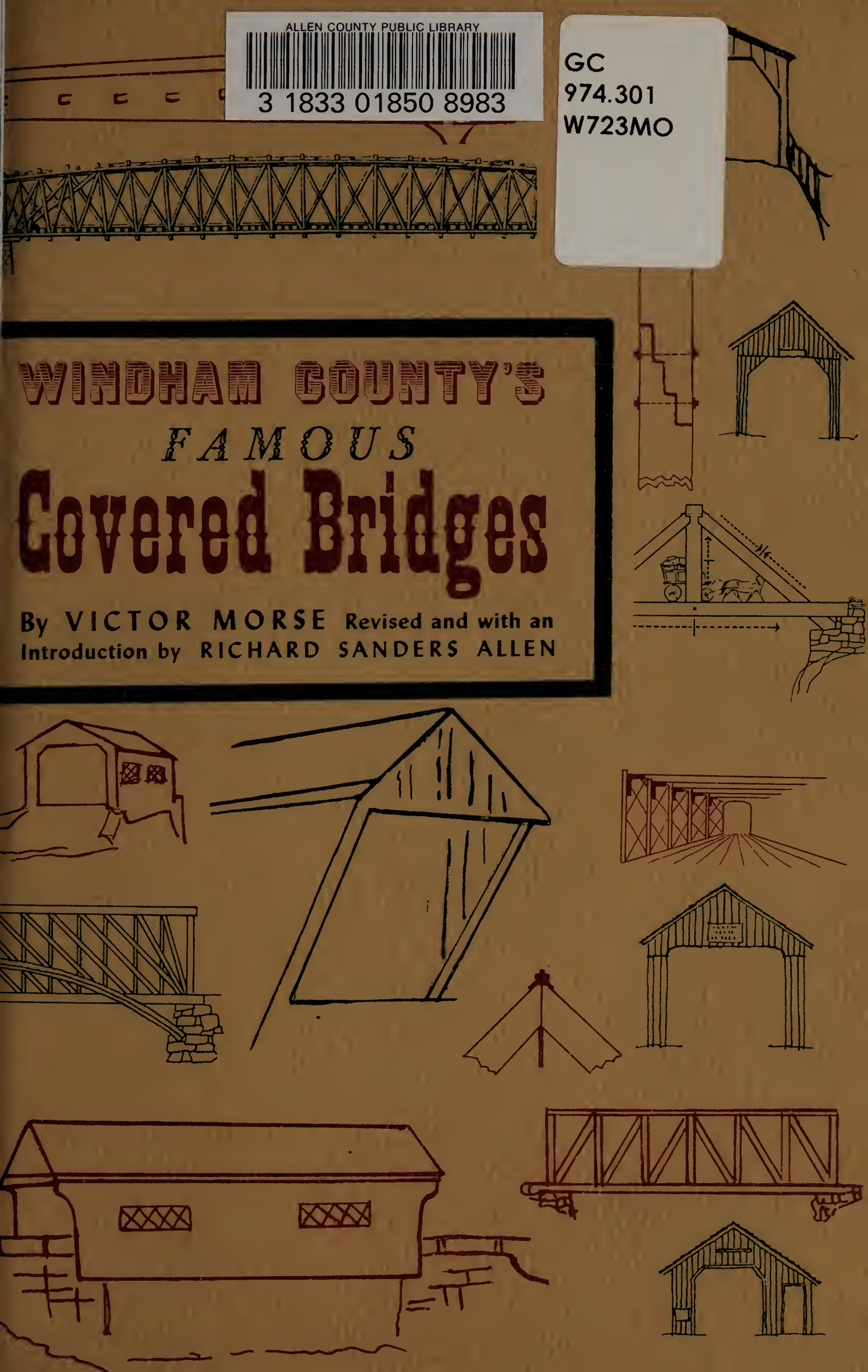
WINDHAM COUNTY'S *FAMOUS* Covered Bridges

By VICTOR MORSE Revised and with an Introduction by RICHARD SANDERS ALLEN



WINDHAM COUNTY'S

FAMOUS

Covered Bridges

By VICTOR MORSE

Revised and with an Introduction by

RICHARD SANDERS ALLEN

THE BOOK CELLAR

Brattleboro, Vermont, 1960

THE THREE BRIDGES, ON THE NORTH SIDE OF BRATTLEBORO LONG AGO. ON OPPOSITE PAGE—THE TOLL BRIDGE OVER THE CONNECTICUT FROM BRATTLEBORO TO BARRETTS ISLAND, GOING OUT IN THE FLOOD OF 1869; LITTLE RIVER BRIDGE IN DISTANCE.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Seeking to bring the facts of covered bridge preservation home to the general public are well-established groups of working hobbyists. In this area, the Connecticut Valley Covered Bridge Society is particularly active, and is headed by Mrs. Orrin H. Lincoln of Greenfield, Massachusetts. Then there is the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges, Inc. of Boston. Dr. Stanley Banks of Brattleboro, Windham County's leading proponent of covered bridges, finds time to further the interests of both groups.

Compilation of this story of Windham County's covered bridges, both past and present, is primarily from the original research of Victor Morse, done in 1936-37. The stories of these bridges were first published in the *Brattleboro Daily Reformer* and later gathered together in a booklet published by that paper. They form a worthy contribution to both local and engineering history.

Mr. Morse and the *Reformer* were particularly indebted to Mrs. M. L. Johnson of Wardsboro, and Town Clerks C. W. Cutler of Townshend, Lynn Fullam of Westminster, Leon Bogle of Dover, Rena B. Reed of Dummerston and R. G. Wilder of Jamaica.

To these may now be added Mrs. Harlow Howard of West Dover; Howard C. Rice of the *Reformer;* John Hooper, also of the *Reformer,* who has kindly supplied several pictures; George F. Webb of Bellows Falls; and Mrs. Leon C. White of Brattleboro, daughter of the Caleb Lamson whose West Dummerston Bridge of 1872 has survived to become the longest covered bridge in the State of Vermont; and pictures from: H. M. Bristol, L. R. Brown, M. C. DeVito, Basil Kievit, George B. Pease, E. H. Royce, G. B. P. Slenco.—R.S.A.

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TUCKER TOLL BRIDGE AT BELLOWS FALLS IN 1903

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 2
INTRODUCTION 4
BRATTLEBORO 6
- Creamery Bridge 6
- Other bridges 7

BROOKLINE 9
DOVER 9
DUMMERSTON 10
- West Dummerston Bridge 10
- Taft Bridge 11

GRAFTON 11
- Kidder Bridge 11
- Cambridgeport Bridge 12
- Mill Bridge 13
- Ryder Bridge 13
- Walker Bridge 14

GUILFORD 14
- Green River Bridge 14

JAMAICA 15
- Howard Bridge 15
- Other bridges 16

LONDONDERRY 16
NEWFANE 17
- Williamsville Bridge 17
- Branch Bridge 18
- Brookside Bridge 18
- Newfane Village Bridge 20
- South Newfane Bridge 20
- Wardsboro Road Bridge 21

PUTNEY 21
- Coolidge Highway Gift Shop 22
- Santa's Land 22
- Covered Bridge Gift Shop 22

ROCKINGHAM 22
- Bartonsville Bridge 22
- Worrall Bridge 22
- Depot Hill Bridge 22
- Hall Bridge 24
- Jones Bridge 25
- Saxtons River Bridge 26
- Other bridges 26

TOWNSHEND 30
- Scott Bridge 30
- Depot Bridge 32
- Harmonyville Bridge 33
- Holland Bridge 33

VERNON 35
WARDSBORO 35
- Center Bridge 35

WESTMINSTER 37
- Gage's Bridge 37
- Sabin Bridge 38
- Lewis Bridge 39
- Earlier bridges 40
- Walpole Bridge 41
- Basin Farm Bridge 41

WHITINGHAM 42
WILMINGTON 42
- High Mowing Farm Bridge 42

MAP of Windham County Bridges 44

LAST LOG DRIVE—CONNECTICUT RIVER BRIDGE, BRATTLEBORO

INTRODUCTION

To a great many people the picture of a covered bridge suggests Vermont, and the Green Mountain State is famed as a stronghold of this type of river crossing. Not another of the fifty states has built and still maintains so many of these American landmarks in so small a geographical area. For Vermont terrain, covered bridges were the natural answer, since roads cross and recross the rippling streams of its uncountable valleys: wood was plentiful on the long mountain ranges and Vermonters knew how to make use of it.

Of the twenty-two towns in Windham County, all but five once boasted at least one covered bridge. Records show at least one in or bordering every town except Athens, Halifax, Marlboro, Stratton and Windham. Fourteen still stand at this writing, and so give this southeasternmost county the second highest number (after Lamoille) in the state. And the figures are constantly changing.

Windham County also had its full share of covered bridges across the Connecticut. Only two—Dummerston and Vernon—of its six towns on the big river never had at least one sheltered crossing to the New Hampshire shore built by privately organized toll companies.

The county's remaining covered spans are easily accessible. Nine of them can be seen from and reached by state highways, and slight detours on good paved and gravel roads will bring the casual traveler readily to the rest.

In addition to being in Vermont's covered bridge forefront, Windham County has other superlatives. West Dummerston Bridge is the state's longest on a highway (280 feet) and Scott Bridge has Vermont's longest single span (166 feet). Still high on the list of Vermont towns with covered bridges, Rockingham has five, and in addition certainly holds another all-time record: in this comparatively small New England town at one time or another stood seventeen covered highway and railroad bridges, with four more just over the line in Westminster. Dummerston's Taft Bridge was selected as representative of all Vermont covered bridges, and was moved piecemeal to become a feature of the reconstructed Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts. And perched high above Whetstone Brook beside Vermont Rte. 9 just west of Brattleboro, Creamery Bridge is probably Windham's best-known covered crossing. Its likeness has been reproduced on perhaps thousands of tourist camera films

and it appears in different versions of time, angle and season on greeting cards and in advertisements from Quoddy to Kure.

Covered bridges began to appear in New England early in the nineteenth century, for ordinary wooden spans were found to be short-lived unless protected from the vagaries of the weather. In 1820 Ithiel Town, an architect of New Haven, Connecticut, invented a patent truss plan that found favor all over the northeast. Called the Town lattice truss—the inventor often referred to his creation as a "mode"—it consisted of heavy plank arranged crisscross in a quadrangular framework, and held firmly together by large wooden pins.

Windham County covered bridge builders—men like Sanford Granger of Westminster, Dexter Morse of Newfane, Caleb B. Lamson of Brattleboro (but born in South Newfane) and Harrison Chamberlain of Townshend—made the Town lattice the standard type in the county. Even after newer and more efficient covered bridges (using iron rods instead of trussed wood) were introduced, the builders and their apprentice-successors kept right on throwing their favorite Town type bridges across the larger streams.

For spanning the smaller rivers and brooks, simple trusses—triangular arrangements of timbers called kingposts and queenposts—were used. These trusses are similar to those used in framing the old house and barn roofs. Kingpost trusses form part of Scott Bridge in Townshend, and queenposts carry both the Depot Bridge at West Townshend and the upper bridges on Saxtons River.

Practically all early covered bridges were built by "judgment" because mathematical stress analysis was unknown until 1847. The builders had no way of computing how much weight each wooden member would have to carry, but with good sense they allowed what they thought to be a generous margin of safety. Two tons was an enormous load a century ago, yet today the bridges often are subjected to four times that weight. They creak and flinch, but they usually hold.

Covered bridges are by no means structures of beauty. Plastered with circus bills, posters for spavin cure, soap and an endless variety of nostrums, they can be downright ugly. But in Windham County, as elsewhere in New England, they are usually shaded by trees and span clear-running streams as emblems of the simple rugged life of the not-too-distant past.

Even as they disappear from the American scene, covered bridges are being recognized as something more than just obsolete links with former days. Appalled by the rising costs of new bridges, frugal town officers are taking a new look at their covered spans. Bridges located on secondary roads, and which have not been too badly neglected, are more than an historic heritage: they are logical, economical and efficient structures.

August 1960

RICHARD SANDERS ALLEN

CREAMERY BRIDGE

BRATTLEBORO

Creamery Bridge

Brattleboro's sole surviving covered bridge is one of the best, as far as utility and condition are concerned, to be found. Although Creamery Bridge stands basically as it was built, it has been conscientiously repaired and reinforced, and promises to last a long time.

Built in 1879 at a total cost of $1,037.80 to replace a bridge wrecked by a freshet the previous November, the selectmen proudly reported that while the bridge cost more than it would have if local carpenters had been familiar with covered bridge building, it cost less than the estimate of A. H. Wright, noted Greenfield, Massachusetts, bridge builder. Moreover, the lattices were half an inch thicker than his specifications and spruce lumber was used, while Wright made his estimate for hemlock. (Many New England bridges were built of hemlock, which has proved itself durable; but spruce has been found to be better because it is lighter and has to support less of its own weight.)

Creamery Bridge was built in the same year as the Elliot Street iron bridge, another Whetstone Brook crossing. Thus was provided a sort of endurance race, with the comparative durability of wooden and iron bridges at issue. Creamery Bridge and the virtues of wood won out, for the Elliot Street Bridge was replaced in 1948.

Among the men who built the bridge or supplied material for it were: B. A. Clark, C. F. Thompson, S. N. Herrick, J. A. Church, Thomas Mitchell, D. W. Miller, L. G. Pratt, A. H. Stowe, H. C. Winchester, W. H. Fisher, John Hood, J. N. Herrick and T. P. Knight.

The bridge is of the Town lattice construction so widely used for New England covered bridges. The timbers are fastened to one another and to the chords at top and bottom by big wooden pins. This type of truss was named after Ithiel Town, a Connecticut architect who invented it in 1820, some

twenty-seven years before the mathematical process of designing bridges was conceived.

Creamery Bridge, so called after the old Brattleboro Creamery which stood beyond it, is one of the few in the county to be painted. It is barn red and the inside shows traces of a coat of fire-resistant whitewash applied long ago. In keeping with its urban setting there is a street light inside. Years ago village covered bridges often were lighted at night with oil lanterns and many a boy of the old school earned $2 a year by tending them.

The covered sidewalk at one side was put on about forty years ago, and slate replaced shingles on the roof—two features which make Creamery Bridge unique in Windham County. On the west side of the bridge are traces of what was once an advertisement of the drugstore operated by George A. Briggs in quarters now occupied by the Vermont National & Savings Bank.

In recent years Creamery Bridge has received national publicity for its Christmas decorations. These feature wreaths, greenery and a festive Santa's sleigh and reindeer mounted on the roof, all bathed in light at night. Decorating the bridge has become an annual event sponsored by the Brattleboro Lions Club and supervised by Dr. Stanley D. Banks of that town.

Other Brattleboro Bridges

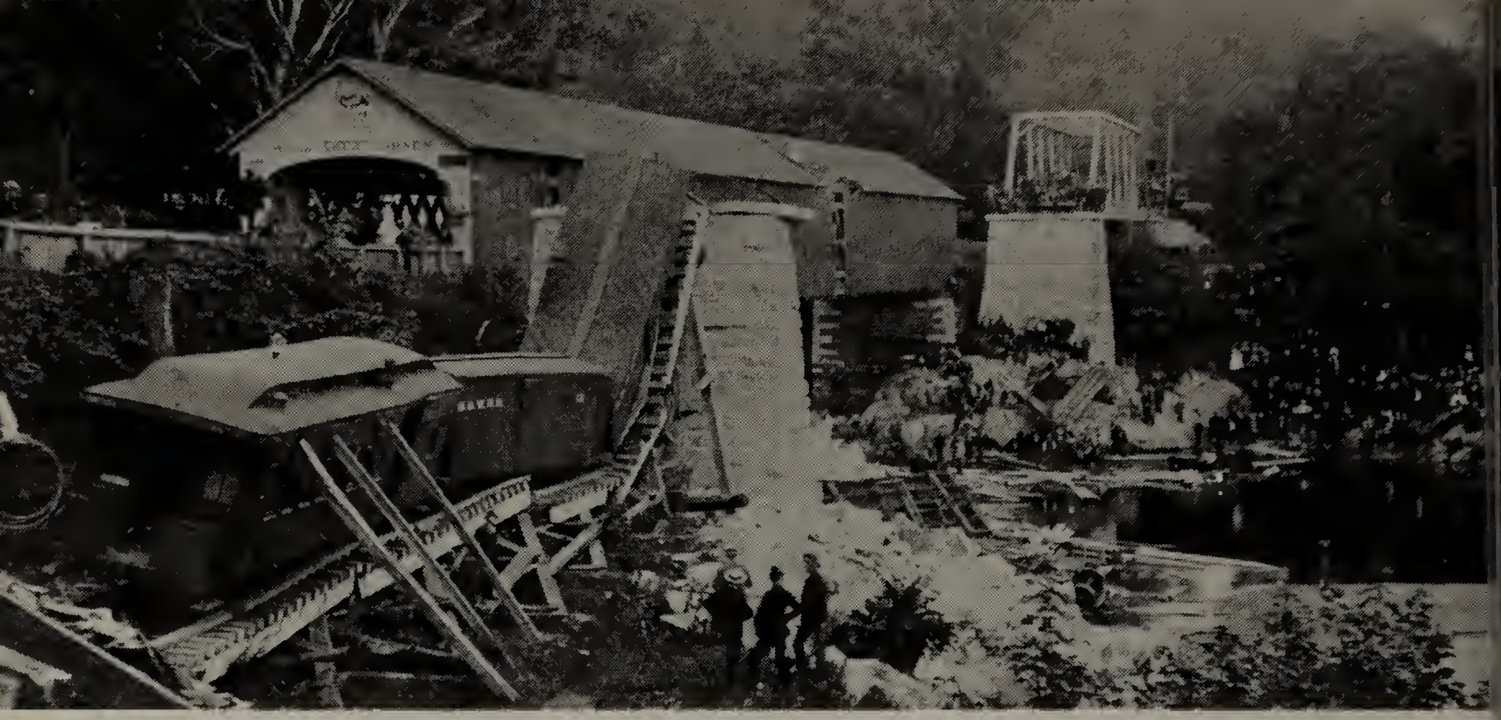
Whetstone Brook was at one time crossed by four covered bridges in addition to the famous Creamery structure. An old bird's-eye view of 1886 shows roofed highway spans crossing the brook on Western Avenue, Brook Road and Elm Street. An even older print portrays a large two-span covered wooden railroad bridge over the mouth of Whetstone, parallel to the Connecticut River and on the site now occupied by the stone arch.

Well remembered is the big old bridge to the north of town at Three Bridges, crossing the West River on what is now U.S. Rte. 5. Back in 1841 it was first built as a covered structure by Capt. Nathaniel Bliss of Brattleboro. This crossing, like its flimsy trestle predesessors, was a toll bridge. Dummerstonians and Putneyites were naturally irritated by the tollgathering. Their representatives persuaded the General Assembly to pass an act enabling courts to take (for compensation) any real estate, turnpike franchises and the like, "when in their judgment, the public good requires a public highway."

The local court applied the ruling to the West River Bridge. The absentee bridge owners (mostly Bostonians) argued the constitutionality of the act clear through to the Supreme Court of the United States. They even retained Daniel Webster to give their point of view.

Like his Presidential campaigns, this was another fight that the great Dan'l lost, for the court found in favor of the people. The bridge was made free in 1848, with a paltry $4,000 payment to the disgruntled ex-proprietors.

Though no longer saddled with a tollhouse, that first covered span always



WEST RIVER BRIDGE AT THE TIME OF R.R. BRIDGE COLLAPSE—1886

presented an ungainly appearance. The bridge sank at the center and its top chords had to have chunks removed in order to make it level. After a freshet in 1862 washed Captain Bliss' creation off down the Connecticut, a more modern covered bridge was placed at the West River's mouth. This became the venerable highway structure which for many years bore the brunt of Connecticut River Valley traffic.

The West River Bridge figured in a story of Rudyard Kipling's. In "A Walking Delegate," one horse says to another:

"Kin you keep your feet through the West River Bridge, with the narrer-gage comin' in on one side, an' the Montreal flyer the other, an' the old bridge teeterin' between?"

It will be remembered that Kipling lived for a time in Dummerston, and used this Town lattice span on his trips to town. It stood until 1927.

Two bridges were always required to cross the Connecticut at Brattleboro because Barrett's Island divided the river into two courses. The first covered bridges to span the Connecticut here were built in 1831 by two Northampton bridge architects, Capt. Isaac Damon and Lyman Kingsley. They were paid $6,200 for the main river bridge and $1,500 for the small one over the portion of the stream known as Little River. The latter went out in 1843 and was replaced the following year by a new Town lattice bridge built by Henry Reed and Charles Liseum. The main river bridge was taken out by high water on February 19, 1857, to be replaced in turn by a two-span Town lattice structure built for $6,000 by a Newfane man, Dexter Morse. This one succumbed to the great October flood of 1869.

Again an "outside" builder came up to Brattleboro to bridge the Connecticut. This time it was Daniel Harris & Co. of Springfield, Massachusetts, armed with patent rights to build the latest in bridges, a wooden timber and iron-rod Howe truss, reinforced with huge laminated arches. Their bridge withstood freshets and ice jams, plus the annual log drives, from 1870 to 1903. The

smaller span over Little River (actually wholly in New Hampshire) survived until a highway was laid out on a new and straightened location in 1928.

BROOKLINE

Brookline's sole covered bridge of record was a span shared with Newfane over West River north of Newfane Village, and its uncovered replacement is maintained today by four towns—although two of them, Westminster and Putney, are some distance from the bridge site. The cost of maintenance is apportioned among the towns because residents from all of them use the bridge in order to reach the county seat at Newfane.

The original crossing brought about a hassle between Putney and Brookline. In 1828, according to town histories, Putney built the bridge as a means of reaching the shire village by the shortest route; whereupon Brookline filed suit against her eastern neighbor, and then Putney filed a countersuit. The county court ruled that Putney should be assessed for part of the cost and empowered the Putney selectmen to settle with Brookline.

The upshot more than a century and a quarter later is the matter-of-fact arrangement whereby little Brookline and larger Newfane share the access bridge with their sister towns.

DOVER

The covered bridge at the south end of West Dover Village cost just $149.

Covered bridges were never expensive, but there was none in Windham County that approached this little span for economy. One reason is that it was the shortest—only 30 feet long—on a public highway. Maintenance costs were light, for traffic did not harm it much, and for fifty-six years high water and the ice of the North Branch of the Deerfield River never did more than break the ends of the sideboards. It was, of course, reshingled from time to time; one half of the roof was given a protective covering of corrugated iron.

John B. Davis, builder and sawmill owner in West Dover, took the contract for the bridge in 1882, and built it with local carpenters on the simple king-post truss plan. This bridge was still another victim of the 1938 flood.

A possibly earlier West Dover bridge, upstream a ways and in the center of the village, went up in smoke one night in 1901 when the local blacksmith shop and two nearby mills caught fire and burned to the ground. One of the animals liberated that night from the Davis barn was an old buck sheep. In no very cordial mood at the time, the sheep treed one William Parsons, a neighbor, and kept him up there the better part of the night.

There are no records of any other covered bridges having existed in Dover, for the reason that the North Branch of the Deerfield is the largest stream in the town, and the terrain east of its northern tributary, Blue Brook, has never been especially inviting for habitation.

WEST DUMMERSTON BRIDGE

DUMMERSTON

West Dummerston Bridge

West Dummerston Bridge, reaching 280 feet across West River by the side of Vermont Rte. 30, is not only the longest in the county, but is also the longest covered bridge wholly within the state of Vermont. A two-span Town lattice type, it is about 5 feet longer than the three-span Scott Bridge upstream in Townshend.

The late Caleb B. Lamson of Brattleboro built the West Dummerston crossing when he was only twenty-two years old. A skilled carpenter before he was out of his 'teens, Lamson was hired by Newfane, Wardsboro and other Windham County towns to build and repair bridges. Today this is the only example of his work left standing—but it makes him a fine monument.

Mr. Lamson built the big structure in 1872 to replace a former bridge located about a quarter-mile upstream; this had been broken in two by the flood of 1869 and carried down to West Dummerston Village, where it lodged as a total wreck against the shore. There was considerable dispute among the citizens over where its replacement should be located. After three years a site was chosen and the bridge put up at a total expenditure, including land damages and abutments, of $7,777.08. Because of the size of this bridge, it cost considerably more than the average for that period.

While West Dummerston Bridge was under construction it collapsed with the loss of one life. Lamson was standing on the top, halfway across the river, when the falsework supporting the structure buckled. As it crumpled he stayed on his perch until he saw which way it was going to fall—then jumped to the other side. He landed in shallow water over rocks and suffered a permanent injury to his back.

A young man from West Brattleboro who had recently come to work was watching Lamson so intently that he never saw his own danger: a falling timber struck him on the head and killed him instantly.

The West River span near the quarry is the original iron lattice bridge on that site, and is not a replacement for a roofed wooden structure. Nearly forgotten is still another West River crossing, a covered bridge near the southern edge of the town. It was destroyed by high water nearly three quarters of a century ago, leaving no trace today.

Taft Bridge

Taft Bridge, a Town lattice structure built across Stickney Brook about 1870, was rather unromantic for a covered bridge. Neither written records nor local legends linked it with any unusual or interesting circumstance. It merely did its job of carrying traffic along what is now Vermont Rte. 30 from one bank of the brook to the other and it took a terrific pounding for a good many years without flinching. It was, however, destined for unforseen fame and longevity.

Down in Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts, stands a reconstructed community typical of the life of a century ago. It was a foregone conclusion that the village would need a covered bridge. Presented by the Vermont Highway Department to Sturbridge in 1951, Taft Bridge was dismantled piece by piece and trucked seventy-eight miles to its new Bay State location.

George H. Watson, superintendent of construction at Sturbridge, had a causeway built out into the Quinebaug River and placed the rebuilt lattice span on new abutments above a milldam in the stream. It served as a handsome exit from the village for three years.

Then the hurricane of August 1955 pushed the Quinebaug to unprecedented heights and its floodwaters caused extensive damage at Sturbridge. Taft Bridge washed off its abutments and was saved only by ropes which snubbed it to trees on shore. A decision was made to move the bridge to a safer position, and during the next winter the old span was moved a second time to what is hoped will be its permanent site. Now called Vermont Bridge, it reaches across an arm of the Quinebaug River between millponds.

The unknown builder of the bridge would probably be incredulous that anyone would want to shift his creation from Dummerston to a Massachusetts village. And he would certainly whistle at the price that Old Sturbridge paid out in transportation charges. Whereas the original contractor probably counted his materials and labor in the low hundreds, the double move some eighty years later cost a cool $25,540.08.

GRAFTON

Kidder Bridge

How much longer Kidder Bridge stands makes little difference except to covered bridge fanciers, for it no longer takes traffic anywhere. Stretching across the South Branch of Saxtons River in Grafton, it stands on a road

KIDDER BRIDGE

leading from the village to the Bear Hill district. Beyond the bridge the road has grown up to brush.

Seventy years ago, when about twenty men were employed in the quarry and finishing mill, great wagonloads of soapstone from the big quarries on Bear Hill creaked across on their way to market. When the demand for soapstone fell off, the quarry was closed and half forgotten. A few hill farms in the district were not worked for long.

Kidder Bridge, built about 1870, is of the queenpost truss type often used by New England's bridge builders for relatively short crossings (Ithiel Town's lattice was usually chosen for longer spans). It is still in good condition, probably because it hasn't had to do much work in recent years. However an occasional hiker, bound for the scenic Bear Hill region, makes good use of it.

Cambridgeport Bridge

The declining village of Cambridgeport, once a thriving hamlet of mills, stores and neat houses, is split in two by the Rockingham-Grafton line. The Cambridgeport covered bridge lay on the Grafton side and was one of the principal features of the village.

This was one of the bridges Grafton built after the flood of 1869, which probably hit that town harder than it did any other in this section of New England. When the water had gone down, not a single bridge was left in the township.

Grafton was one of the few towns that stuck to shingles for bridge roofs, although on this bridge the shingles gave way—at least on one side—to cor-

rugated iron. The truss was a queenpost, a standard design among Grafton's bridges, which suggests that one man may have built them all.

Cambridgeport Bridge, toward the end, gave every appearance of wanting to fold in the next big wind; its floor had a frightful sag, and tourists unaccustomed to covered bridges always breathed easier after emerging from it. It was finally replaced in 1941 by a concrete structure.

CAMBRIDGEPORT BRIDGE

Mill Bridge

A one-man bridge led from Grafton's main street to a little woodworking mill on the south side of Saxtons River. The mill was once a considerable factor in the town's industrial life and Mill Bridge was built solely to serve it. There just was no other way to get lumber in and out.

Built in 1870 with a shingled roof, this small queenpost truss bridge stood for some eighty years. Though it saw little traffic, most of what it did get was heavy, and the span required as much repairing as bridges on regularly used roads.

Ryder Bridge

Ryder Bridge in Grafton was another built after the flood of 1869, one of four between the villages of Grafton and Cambridgeport. A queenpost truss, it was strengthened with laminated arches and iron rods but still sagged badly. The confines beneath the shingled roof were darker than most, which made the name of "kissing bridge," a description current in horse-and-buggy days, particularly apt: if the nag was slow enough, the bridge long enough, and the girl willing enough, two kisses could be counted on.

Though early bridge builders may have had foresight in regard to struc-

RYDER BRIDGE

tural strength, they failed to make proper allowance for floods. Vermont bridges were repeatedly carried away by freshets in the first half of the nineteenth century, and some sites have had as many as half a dozen spans. Each time the bridges were rebuilt higher, longer and stronger until the lesson of '69 put most of them out of water's reach. From then on there were comparatively few bridge losses in the state until 1927. In Windham County the highest crest came in September 1938, taking Ryder Bridge along with it.

Walker Bridge

Grafton's Walker Bridge ended a useful life of sixty-seven years in November 1937, when it was torn down and traffic began to flow over a new bridge near by. A queenpost truss type with shingled roof, it had been an invalid for some time prior to '37, with props and guy wires keeping it out of Saxtons River.

In the atom and steel age the strength of wooden bridges is often underestimated. A few years ago the authorities of a small town in northern Vermont decided one of their covered bridges was unsafe, so they added big laminated arches to its trusses. The arches were intended to rest on the abutments and lift some of the weight off the wooden members. One day a sudden shower came up during a popular outdoor fair and everyone rushed to the shelter of the nearby bridge; while the shower lasted it was packed with people. The town fathers looked at the crowd and complimented themselves for putting in the arches. After the rain had stopped, someone inspected the bridge—and found that the arches failed to touch the abutments by a matter of inches!

GUILFORD

Green River Bridge

Guilford's only remaining covered bridge spans Green River at Green River Village. It was built in the early 1870s to replace a bridge lost in the flood of 1869, which tore out every bridge on Green River. Part of a house standing at one end of this bridge was also carried away.

For a few years after the flood the river was crossed at this point by a

temporary, crib-supported structure a short distance downstream. Ultimately the town recovered enough from highway and bridge losses to build this one using the familiar Town lattice truss.

The Post No Bills warning is still legible at each end of the bridge, yet until recently there were many surviving advertisements for soap, spavin cure, elixir and plug tobacco. A sign at each end also promises a $2 fine for driving a horse through faster than a walk, a standard precaution against setting up a vibration that would weaken the trusswork. The ends of the bridge are painted red and provide an extra splotch of color in a lovely village of predominately yellow dwellings. Green River Bridge also houses Guilford's town derrick and shelters the rural mailboxes of local residents.

GREEN RIVER BRIDGE

Another covered bridge built a short distance upstream around 1870 was replaced a few years ago by a concrete bridge.

JAMAICA

Howard Bridge

Howard Bridge, which crossed Winhall River at Rawsonville in the town of Jamaica, was among the youngest in Windham County—a mere forty-nine years of age—when replaced in 1938. Named for its builder, David Howard, it was completed in the fall of 1889.

HOWARD BRIDGE

Covered bridges built on New England public highways later than this are rare: steel and concrete have supplanted them. Of queenpost truss construction, Howard Bridge was also unusual for its roof, which was almost flat.

Other Jamaica Bridges

The covered Howard Bridge was Jamaica's last. Several other interesting examples were destroyed by the elements.

The flood of 1927 swept away two over West River. One was French Bridge, a couple of miles south of Jamaica Village, and the other was Wardsboro Bridge, on the road from East Jamaica to Wardsboro. Both were succeeded by big steel arch structures.

Almost wholly forgotten is the fact that Jamaica had a little covered span over Ball Mountain Brook, right in the village on North Street. The big freshet of 1869 washed it out, and its replacement was a simple wooden span without covering.

In 1925 Jamaica lost another covered bridge in a windstorm, a sturdy Town lattice span at the old railroad station. It is the only instance in this section of a bridge's being destroyed by wind: it was folded up like an accordion, without there being a rotten stick in it.

LONDONDERRY

Although town meeting records show concern for bridges in Londonderry as early as 1781, the town's principal covered bridge was built across the West River, in South Londonderry, in the early 1800s. In the flood of 1842 the bridge was carried out, together with mills and all other buildings in the area.

A successor at this site, a venerable landmark for many years, stood until 1937, when it was replaced by a routine "modern" structure. That it had

never burned was remarkable, for South Londonderry Village is jammed into a narrow point of the West River Valley and much of it is on the riverbanks, so that on three corners this bridge was attached to frame buildings and on the fourth was separated from another only by an arm's length.

ONCE OVER JONES BROOK

Another Londonderry covered bridge once spanned Jones Brook at the foot of the Peru Mountain road.

NEWFANE

Williamsville Bridge

Evidence as to the age of the Williamsville Bridge appears to be lacking. It survived the flood of 1869, but how long it was there before this no one knows. There is a possibility that it may have been built by Newfane's well-known bridge builder, Caleb B. Lamson; or he may have only repaired it in later years. The Williamsville landmark crosses the Marlboro Branch to the west of Williamsville on the road to South Newfane.

It is a sturdy Town lattice type bridge, 120 feet long and with white paint on both ends as an aid for automobile headlights at night. Although one end is considerably higher than the other, it wasn't built that way. The east end was raised to keep water (the greatest enemy of wooden bridges) from running into it, since the approach is downhill. This made a bump unsuitable for modern traffic, so the road was raised too. And water again runs into it during every big rain.

Fifty years ago a covered bridge at the other end of Williamsville was destroyed by fire when a four-story mill nearby went up in flames and the bridge caught fire from it. A concrete arch bridge took its place.

Branch Bridge

Built in 1837, Newfane's Branch Bridge survived a century and was for a long time the second oldest in the county. It was known among outsiders as the Williamsville Station Bridge, but it was locally called Branch Bridge because it spanned the first branch of West River. (By others the stream is called the Marlboro Branch, but Newfane residents insist that it is simply "the branch" up to the point where it divides into the Dover Branch—Rock River —and the Marlboro Branch.)

Whatever the name of the stream, the bridge across it was a Town lattice, considerably repaired and strengthened in later years to bear tremendous loads by the addition of big laminated arches, consisting of several layers of plank, built into it from abutment to abutment. The date of Branch Bridge was discovered by accident. Workmen found it on one end, so weathered it was hardly distinguishable. The figures were raised a quarter-inch above the rest of the boards, where the paint protected the wood from erosion by the elements.

This was one of two covered bridges on the branch to survive the flood of 1869. By-passed in 1938 when a new highway structure was erected a short distance downstream, it seemed destined for honored retirement as an historic relic. However "for reasons of safety" the Vermont State Highway Department razed the span in 1940.

Brookside Bridge

Brookside Bridge, known also as Gaines Bridge, for many years survived floods and careening trucks on the road between South Newfane and East Dover. In the 1936 flood one abutment was loosened, but the bridge rested on earth behind it (probably it would have been lost if anyone had given it a push). Covered bridge builders usually took care to place their bridge abutments well back from the stream.

Soon after the flood, a truck wasn't able to make the curve and went through the side of Brookside Bridge into Rock River. Neither of the two occupants was hurt but the bridge needed considerable attention and the town of Newfane collected some $50 in damages. When new lattices were put in, the bridge carpenters fastened them with wooden pins as their predecessors had done. But evidently there was some lack of faith, for they also used iron bolts beside the pins. The bridge was totally destroyed in the hurricane-flood of September 1938.

WILLIAMSVILLE BRIDGE

BROOKSIDE BRIDGE

BRANCH BRIDGE

NEWFANE VILLAGE

SOUTH NEWFANE

Newfane Village Bridge

Newfane generations have come and gone since Newfane Village Bridge was built across Newfane Brook in 1841. Soldiers marched across the Newfane Village Bridge to Civil War battlefields. President Taft rode over it, as well as over other West River Valley bridges, on his visit to his ancestral home in Townshend. It saw the jubilant welcome to the first West River Railroad train and the unobserved departure of the last truckload of rails.

The bridge was built with Town lattice trusses whose sound wood held firm for over a century. It was the custom of lattice truss builders to make the bridge with a slight hump in the center; traffic then tended to beat the hump down and tighten the joints. The windows in the sides were cut since the days of automobiles. Only the longest of covered bridges were built originally with windows, but the coming of the motor age called for more light than would enter at the ends. With speeding cars, the interior of a dim-lit covered span was no longer a place to linger!

After over one hundred years of service, Newfane Village Bridge was replaced by a concrete structure in 1945. Its timbers were stored for a while in the hope that it might be erected as an historical attraction at another site. Funds were not forthcoming, however, and nothing came of the project.

South Newfane Bridge

The bridge in South Newfane wasn't born a covered bridge—it became one.

SANTA'S LAND, PUTNEY

MINIATURE R.R., PUTNEY

According to Newfane folk, it was built without roof or sides, but later was covered for its own protection.

South Newfane Bridge can be dated only by memories, which do not agree, and sketchy documentary evidence. Some say it was built across the Marlboro Branch after the flood of 1869; others, after a freshet in 1888. One thing is certain: Newfane lost bridges in both years.

How it stood so long was something of a miracle, for it was of simple and inexpensive queenpost construction. It was staggered by every rush of high water, but somehow it managed to cling to its abutments: even its center pier, a crib of timbers, held firm in floodtimes. Frequently repaired, the battered structure stayed on the job until 1941, when it was replaced.

Wardsboro Road Bridge

Carrying a small load of traffic toward South Wardsboro and posing for artists were the chief duties of the smallest of Newfane's covered bridges. The Wardsboro Road Bridge across Newfane Brook wasn't photographed as much as some on more heavily traveled ways, but its portrait was painted perhaps more times than that of any other in the county. When it was built is not definitely known, but the style of construction—queenpost trusswork—and the memory of older residents place it in the 1860s.

Only two decades ago Newfane ranked high on the lists of Vermont towns with covered bridges. Altogether it had seven: two over Newfane Brook and five over the Marlboro Branch. In addition, the town shared a West River covered crossing with Brookline.

With the passing of the Wardsboro Road bridge in 1958, Newfane was reduced to only one covered bridge, that at Williamsville.

PUTNEY

Putney once boasted a little wooden truss bridge over Sacketts Brook at Slab Hollow. And between Putney and Westmoreland (New Hampshire) a piling-and-trestle bridge once crossed the Connecticut River. Here, in 1820, the ele-

COVERED BRIDGE GIFT SHOP, PUTNEY

phant Horatio, valued member of a traveling circus, broke through and tumbled to his death on the rocks below.

There was also a short-lived bridge—believed to have been covered—about a mile above the trestle structure, built in 1830 and gone again by 1846.

Today U.S. Rte. 5 through Putney is a center of covered bridge replicas. There is a very small one on the miniature railroad at the Coolidge Highway Gift Shop. And another larger specimen—surely one of the most resplendently painted bridges in New England—adorns John R. Poppele's nearby Santa's Land. Also in Putney is a full-sized reproduction, modeled generally on Brattleboro's Creamery Bridge, which many people take for an actual former highway bridge; it serves as the Covered Bridge Gift Shop, operated by James W. Rand.

ROCKINGHAM

Bartonsville Bridge

Spanning Williams River in Rockingham at Bartonsville is one of the strongest covered bridges in Windham County. It carries comparatively heavy traffic, including many trucks, but the sturdy Town lattice trusses show few signs of weakening.

The bridge, completed by Sanford Granger in 1871 at a cost of $4241, was built to replace one lost in the flood of 1869 when the raging water tore out two covered bridges, the Rutland Railroad station and several houses.

Bartonsville Bridge has little to commend it except its sturdiness. At one end it discharges traffic onto railroad tracks, and it lacks the shady entrances that make so many covered bridges picturesque.

Worrall Bridge

Worrall Bridge, a Town lattice structure, was built in 1867-68 by Sanford Granger as a result of the great 1869 flood. High water in 1936 and 1938 damaged but did not displace it. Visible from Vermont Rte. 103, it is located on a little-used road between Brockway's Mills and Bartonsville.

In addition to the Bartonsville, Worrall and Depot Hill Bridges, at least two other covered wooden structures once crossed the Williams River in Rockingham. One served Nourse's (later Brockway's) Mills for many years. And on the old valley road along the west bank of the Connecticut there was one near the mouth of the stream which stood until 1927.

Depot Hill Bridge

Proceeding upstream, Depot Hill Bridge (also called Abbott Bridge) is the first of three covered bridges across the Williams River in Rockingham. It is not visible from a main highway and it is seldom seen by casual travelers, al-

BARTONSVILLE BRIDGE

WORRALL BRIDGE

DEPOT HILL BRIDGE

HALL BRIDGE

though it once was kept busy carrying passengers and freight to and from the old Rockingham depot of the Rutland Railroad. Construction is of the Town lattice type.

Few records are available on Williams River bridges, but evidence suggests that this one is over one hundred years old. The road it is on was surveyed in 1837, though the bridge was built in 1869-70 by Charles Holt. However at this point riverbanks are high and precipitous and undoubtedly a bridge was necessary from the first. The flood of 1869 took out nearly all the bridges on Williams River. This one appears to be older than others along the stream. Its abutments are unusually high and it appears to be well out of flood's reach.

Hall Bridge

In bygone days thousands of pleasure-bent men, women and children trooped over the Hall Bridge in Rockingham enroute to Barber Park, a picnic ground, recreation center and site of countless holiday celebrations. Now it carries an occasional car across Saxtons River on a little-used road.

This structure, which old-timers used to call the Osgood Bridge, was built in 1867 by Sanford Granger, and is a departure in construction from the design generally used hereabouts prior to 1860. It has Town lattices of the same basic design used in bridges of the early nineteenth century. Its roadway is narrower than standard; most early lattice bridge builders made them 20 feet wide overall, leaving a 17-foot passage inside, ample for two cars. Hall Bridge is strictly for one-way traffic.

Saxtons River was once a nest of covered bridges. Along its length there were fourteen, while in Grafton a fifteenth (see Kidder Bridge, above) still crosses the South Branch of the stream. The lesson of '69 was well learned and the Saxtons River bridges built after that date were well out of danger for nearly seventy years, being constructed several feet higher above the stream and made 12 to 20 feet longer than their predecessors.

Jones Bridge

Traffic over Jones Bridge, crossing Saxtons River in Rockingham, has doubled in volume over the ninety years since it was built: today it serves two families, but originally it served only one. A quarter-mile of road leads off the Saxtons River-Grafton highway (Vermont Rte. 121), runs through the bridge and comes to a complete stop at two houses.

Back in 1869 there was only the Gilson place at the end of the road and the flimsy uncovered structure that went out in the flood of that year may have been privately owned. Then when Rockingham was building so many new bridges in 1870, the town apparently felt that it might as well put a good one here, too. Jones Bridge—the origin of its name is not certain—is carried by queenpost trusswork and is of average length although only wide enough for a single car. It was built by A. S. Granger.

That just two families have a town-built bridge is not quite the luxury it seems to be. All the early big bridges over the Connecticut River were toll bridges, built under charters obtained from legislatures. Many of them paid their owners so well that public discontent began to grow. Some bridge owners even charged varying rates of toll depending on whether the traveler was friend, enemy or stranger. This heightened indignation, and the opinion

JONES BRIDGE

that bridges should be publicly owned became predominant. The practice of granting toll bridge charters was curtailed and towns began to build more and more of their own crossings. Private bridges, unless strictly for personal use, became a thing of the past and towns adopted the policy of giving every man a way to get to and from his property.

Saxtons River Bridge

After what the Saxtons River Village Bridge went through it should have stood forever. All one summer it took the pounding of trunk-line traffic without flinching.

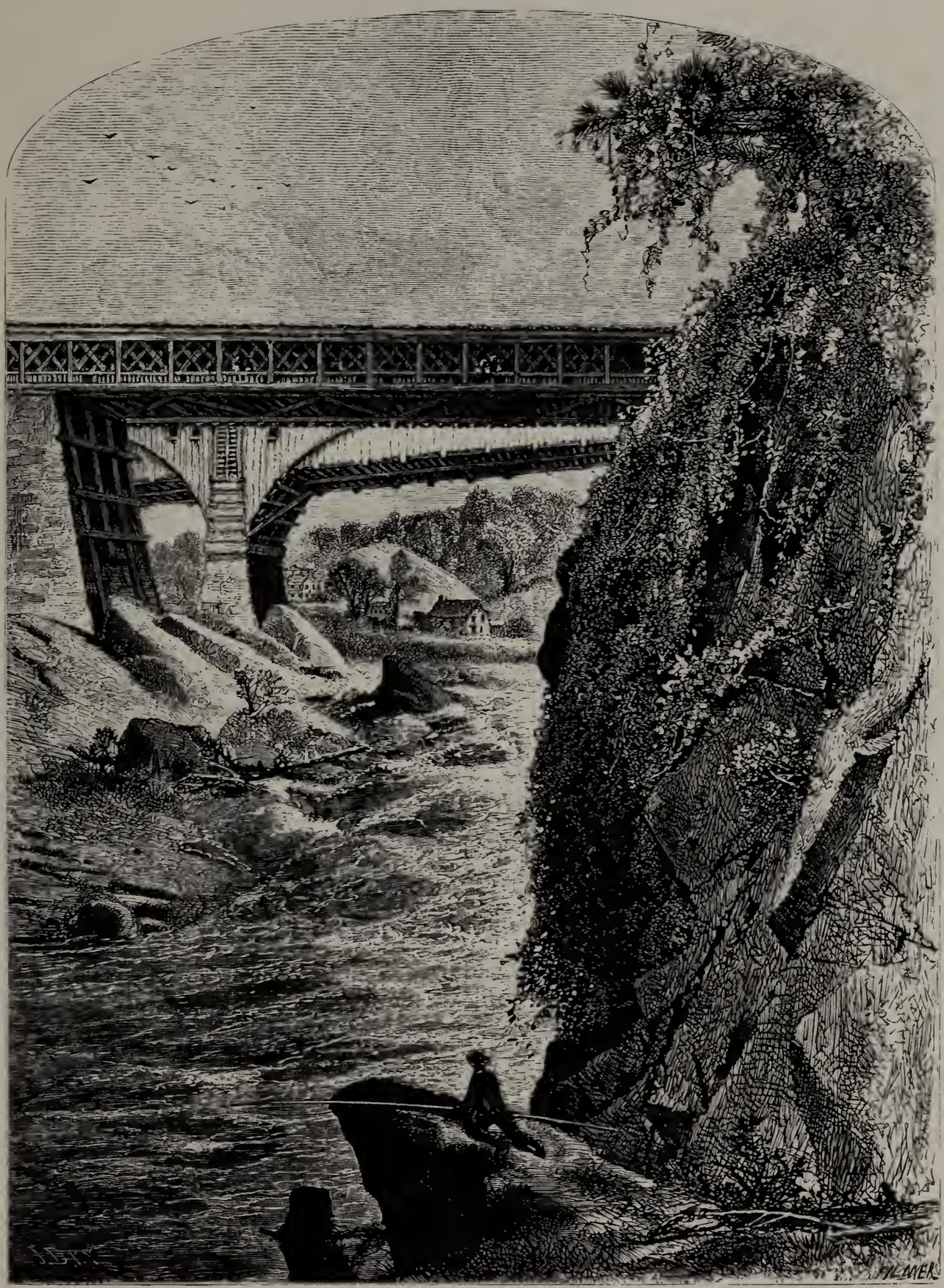
When a long strip of concrete road was laid through Westminster and Putney on U.S. Rte. 5, traffic was detoured through Westminster West and Saxtons River, and this bridge carried it all for several months. The downhill approach to one end allowed heavy trucks to roar down, hurtle over a little bump at the entrance and land solidly on the wooden floor. After a while it was found that the stringers supporting the floor had been snapped, and all that kept the trucks from falling through into the river were a few iron rods which had been put in underneath as auxiliary braces.

This decorative and typical "village bridge" was painted red on the ends and sported a covered sidewalk on one side. Thompson's sawmill near the south end was started in 1870 to get out the lumber for it (a previous covered bridge, built by Sanford Granger, went out in the flood of 1869). Saxtons River's bridge bore the date 1870 on its portals and was a single-span Town lattice structure, strengthened by the later addition of laminated arches on either side. Thirty years ago highway officials decided that it needed a stone pier in the middle to support it, so they spent a lot of money putting one in. The next winter the pier went out with ice and high water but the bridge stood firm, taking its punishment until it was razed in 1949 and replaced by a concrete structure.

Other Rockingham Bridges

With seventeen covered bridges once standing on highways and railroads in the town, Rockingham was for a time among the top New England towns with this type of crossing. In addition to those which stood until modern times, or have separate mention here, there were two covered bridges over the man-made Bellows Falls Canal, right in the village. One brought the Rutland Railroad tracks into the yards from the north; another carried a highway for passengers bound for the depot.

But the most historic bridges were the toll crossings over the Connecticut River. Almost entirely forgotten is the existence of the northernmost of these. Though called Charlestown Bridge, it actually connected South Charlestown



TUCKER TOLL BRIDGE AND CHESHIRE RAILROAD BRIDGE SPANNING THE CONNECTICUT RIVER AT BELLOWS FALLS

FOUR FORMER BRIDGES AT BELLOWS FALLS—TUCKER TOLL AND CHESHIRE RAILROAD BRIDGES AT LOWER RIGHT, THE SULLIVAN COUNTY RAILROAD BRIDGE AT UPPER RIGHT AND CPPOSITE IT, AT FAR LEFT, THE CANAL BRIDGE LEADING TO THE DEPOT. C. 1880.

CANAL BRIDGE, FOR HIGHWAY TO DEPOT

with Vermont's town of Rockingham. A company to build it was chartered in 1828 and the structure was probably erected about that time. After only a decade, in 1839, the bridge was destroyed in a spring freshet and was never replaced.

Bellows Falls was (and is) notable as a town of many celebrated bridges: the three covered spans across the Connecticut were nationally famous.

The river, approaching the falls, first passed under the old Sullivan County Railroad Bridge, originally built in 1851. This two-span, 500-foot crossing accommodated a single track and was closely covered. After passage of a train,

TUCKER TOLL BRIDGE

CHESHIRE RAILROAD BRIDGE, SPANNING THE FALLS

smoke would pour from under the bridge's eaves, giving strangers the impression that it was afire. A Massachusetts engineer, George A. Parker, was in charge of building this railroad landmark; one of his trusted assistants was Nicholas Powers, a well-known Vermont covered bridge builder from Clarendon. Their creation withstood increasing traffic and tonnage until replaced in 1882.

The first railroad bridge to link Bellows Falls with New Hampshire was located just down around the bend of the Connecticut. This one, built in 1849, went by the name of Cheshire Railroad Bridge. Since heavy use was expected, this structure was made with double track, and its twin entrances were graced with stonework portals set into the barnlike interiors of the wooden bridge. Cheshire Railroad Bridge was built under the supervision of young Lucius Boomer, who within a few years was to put the first bridge across the Mississippi River, out at Rock Island, Illinois. Boomer's work at Bellows Falls stood firm for half a century, to be replaced by the present stone arches.

However the best known of Bellows Falls covered bridges was of course the highway crossing, for years a main artery of travel from Vermont to Boston. This was on the site of the first bridge to span the Connecticut, an open affair of piling, braces and deck, built under the direction of Col. Enoch Hale in 1785.

Nathaniel Tucker inherited control of this crossing and eventually, in 1840, had a substantial, 262-foot, two-span covered bridge built high above the spray of the falls. Four men are often mentioned in connection with the building of this bridge, but seldom are they given credit together. First there was Tucker, the man who put up the money, and throughout its long life the structure went by the name of the Tucker Toll Bridge (even after tolls were abolished in 1904). Then there were two "supervising architects" to design the handsome structure and give it sweeping portals and double sidewalks—Isaac Damon and Lyman Kingsley, up from Northampton, Massachusetts. But it was a local sawmill owner and competent bridge contractor, Sanford Granger, who did much of the actual building of this Town lattice structure.

The four collaborators produced a fine bridge which served the community for ninety years, and was a dandy money-maker besides. The steel and concrete Vilas Bridge on the site today has bronze tablets set into its parapet-railing to commemorate both the original Hale Bridge and the Tucker Toll Bridge. Mr. Tucker is named as builder of the latter—and Damon, Kingsley and Bellows Falls' own Sanford Granger are ignored.

TOWNSHEND

Scott Bridge

Second longest covered bridge in the county and the only one with three spans, Scott Bridge in Townshend was built in 1870 as a result of the flood

of 1869. It gets its name from the Henry Scott place, now owned by the Klebrattels at the west end. It crosses West River between Townshend and West Townshend, just off the main West River Valley road, Vermont Rte. 30. The way across it led to a farming area of Wardsboro which has been largely abandoned. Scott Bridge shadows the best swimming hole in the river.

Before the flood of 1869, Townshend's so-called "upper bridge over West River" was located some distance south of the present span. The remains of the east abutment are still visible on the riverbank. On October 18, 1869, soon after the freshet, a town meeting was called to raise money to repair roads and bridges. A committee was chosen to select a new site for the upper bridge, but for some reason the group's first report was not accepted. Two more members were added and the committee was authorized to choose a site, decide what kind of bridge to build and appoint someone to superintend construction. After six months' delay, the bridge was put up in 1870 with Harrison Chamberlain the builder. It was made 276 feet long; used 51,514 board feet of lumber, and cost (including some work the following year) about $5,200.

Nearly half the bridge is over dry land, but this isn't because the river has changed its course. Between the actual west bank of the river and the level meadow there always has been a great gully since men have known the place. Probably it was made by the river long ago. To span the river at this point it was necessary either to fill the gully or extend the bridge across it. Timber was plentiful and carpenters cheap, so the "dry bridge," as it is known, was built.

The river proper was crossed with a single span of Town lattice trusses. The lattice later was reinforced by big wooden arches and its 166-foot length makes it the longest covered, single span in the state. Next, a two-span king-post truss bridge was added to cross the gully. Consequently the Scott Bridge is really two bridges placed end to end under a single roof. In time of flood there is plenty of water under all three spans.

The two-span "dry bridge" is 110 feet long. When it was first built only the lattice truss span was covered and in 1872 some part of that must have collapsed, for the town paid $11 to clear away the fallen roof of the upper bridge. In '73 Townshend voted to cover the rest of the bridge and subsequently paid $207.03 for the job.

During the 1927 flood Scott Bridge was nearly carried off by high water which undermined the western pier at the water's edge and necessitated dumping several old stone walls into the river to fill the hole. However it is an ill flood that does no good, and it greatly improved the swimming hole.

In recent years the crossing has been closed to vehicular traffic. In 1955 Townshend deeded the structure to the Vermont Historic Sites Commission, whose intention it is to keep it in repair. It is the first of representative covered

SCOTT BRIDGE

bridges which the commission plans to acquire and preserve in each of thirteen Vermont counties (only Grand Isle, of the state's fourteen counties, has no covered bridges).

One amusing anecdote is told in connection with the Scott Bridge. Many years ago Seth Allen of West Townshend was hired to reshingle part of it. Allen was given to doing things somewhat differently from anyone else, and he decided to do part of his work by moonlight. He used no stagings, and unless one happened to see him on the roof there was no sign of activity. Late one moonlit night, Leslie Lowe, who lived on the west hill, drove back from Townshend Village behind his old horse Jerry. All was silent as he entered the darkness of the bridge. Suddenly, when he was about halfway across, hammering began above his head. What it was Lowe could not imagine, and Jerry gave him no time to puzzle it out: the old horse decided that the devil was after him and took off at top speed. There ensued one of the wildest rides that Leslie Lowe ever took, and had not the hilly road finally slowed Jerry down, he would have been running until morning.

Depot Bridge

Harrison "Tip" Chamberlain, Townshend's famous covered bridge builder, put up Depot Bridge about 1872. It is on a narrow road leading to the former

West Townshend railroad station. It has remained unaffected by high water, for it doesn't cross a stream but merely a setback of West River.

This bridge, of substantial queenpost construction, was built to replace a flimsy, uncovered wooden bridge. Unfortunately its days are numbered, for waters from the new flood-control dam near Townshend will soon inundate this portion of the valley.

Harmonyville Bridge

South of Townshend proper is the settlement of Harmonyville, where once a small covered bridge on the main road spanned Mill Brook.

Long ago this bridge sported a bright sign on its portal, proclaiming the town's name. This was prominently placed to counteract the slurs of jealous citizens of Townshend, who kept referring to Harmonyville as "Tin Pot."

Holland Bridge

Holland Bridge spanned West River near the southern boundary of the town of Townshend. It took its name from the Holland family, who formerly owned the farm at the south end of the bridge. In its last years its bright green paint job was unique.

First mention of this bridge occurs in Townshend town records with the

DEPOT BRIDGE

HARMONYVILLE BRIDGE

report of the annual March Meeting of 1872. The warrant contained an article to see if the town "will take any measures respecting the rebuilding of the West River bridge near Phillip Rutter's house." The earlier bridge referred to had not been carried away by floods or otherwise destroyed, but apparently was in poor condition. It consisted of two spans, one covered and the other an open wooden truss.

No positive action was taken at that meeting and for two and a half years nothing much seems to have been accomplished, though several special and two regular town meetings were occupied in whole or in part with discussion of what to do. Undoubtedly the arguments and procrastination which the records show were due in part to the fact that at the same time the town was also having to decide whether or not to rebuild Scott Bridge.

At last a decision was made. On November 3, 1874, the town voted to build a bridge across West River near T. J. Holland's. The two-span Town lattice bridge was completed in 1875 at a total initial cost of $4,094.04. Its length was 220 feet, 10 inches. Seventy-five thousand board feet of lumber and 46,500 hemlock shingles went into it. It was supported by a stone pier, the upstream side of which was originally flat but was later changed to a wedge shape to combat the ice.

When one realizes that the bridge was actually constructed twice over for the $4,000-odd, this initial cost seems modest. The bridge was first put together on dry land, on the Holland meadows, in order to insure accurate bor-

HOLLAND BRIDGE

ing of the holes for the wooden pins. Then it was partially taken down, and snaked out to be re-erected on the abutments and pier.

Testimony to the enduring strength of Holland Bridge was given in 1935. Jacks were placed under it at the pier to remove a sag in the center. It was then discovered that so firmly had the trusswork been pinned together that the net result of the jacking was to lift the entire bridge a few inches, as on a pivot. At the same time the state highway department painted the bridge green and laid a tough new floor.

An era in West River Valley travel ended when the seventy-seven-year-old Holland Bridge was removed in 1952.

VERNON

On the present Vermont Rte. 142 south of Brattleboro a covered bridge once spanned Broad Brook in Vernon. This was of unusual construction, on the Howe design with a truss of wooden timbers and iron rods rising halfway up the siding of the bridge. It was probably built by a successor to the firm started in Springfield, Massachusetts, by the truss inventor himself, William Howe.

OVER BROAD BROOK

A similar bridge of identical construction crossed the gully of an unnamed stream at South Vernon, on the road leading to the depot.

WARDSBORO

Center Bridge

Wardsboro's last covered bridge, like some others in Windham County, began its service without a cover. It was a kingpost truss span, was painted red, was "one load of hay wide," and had a shingled roof. It was one of the county's shortest covered bridges—only about 40 feet long. Usually called Center Bridge, it spanned Whetstone Brook between West Wardsboro and Wards-

CENTER BRIDGE

boro Center (known in former years as Bucketville, or Unionville).

This bridge's predecessor crossed the brook a short distance to the south. The flood of 1869 tore out the bridge and part of the road. For years travel between West Wardsboro and the Center was over a hill road, now virtually abandoned.

Toward 1880 a new road was laid out and Center Bridge was built by Fred H. Dexter. The big timbers forming the top chords of the truss were inclined in the shape of an inverted V. As Dexter built the bridge the sides were boarded in this shape, but later an orthodox cover was put on.

During the 1920s one of the first big trucks to haul lumber from Stratton to Wardsboro Station broke through the span. The entire floor and the truck dropped to the brook below, leaving only the bridge's trusses and the shell of the cover. With a new floor, Center Bridge stood until completely destroyed during the hurricane-flood of 1938.

Wardsboro's other covered bridge spanned Whetstone Brook at North Wardsboro. A Town lattice truss, it is thought to have been put up by Caleb B. Lamson, the county's best-known bridge builder. A concrete span replaced it in 1931.

OVER WHETSTONE BROOK

GAGE'S BRIDGE

WESTMINSTER

Gage's Bridge

Built in 1835, Gage's Bridge across Saxtons River in North Westminster is the oldest covered bridge now standing in Windham County. It is 117 feet long, of Town lattice construction, and is the only bridge ever to span the river at this point. It has been repaired several times and strengthened to meet the demands of traffic. About 1890 two big laminated wooden arches were added. Gage's Bridge is still in good condition, probably because it has not had to carry main-highway burdens.

Sanford Granger, widely known in the northern part of the county as a bridge builder, built this crossing, and it used to be known as the Granger Bridge. (He also built the famed Tucker Toll Bridge at Bellows Falls, since replaced.) Granger operated a sawmill where Gage's basket factory now stands near by, and there he probably cut the bridge timbers.

Granger and others in that locality petitioned the county court for a bridge at that point and a road. In consequence a town meeting was held July 18, 1835, "to see if the town will agree to build the road laid out by a committee appointed by the county court on the petition of Sanford Granger and others, the persent season."

The town voted to instruct the town agent to investigate the matter and report to the selectmen if he found no chance for the town "to get rid of making the road so surveyed." In the event that the building of the road could not be avoided, the town instructed the selectmen to levy a tax of 10 cents on the grand list. One condition was that Granger would agree to pay $200 toward the road and build the bridge, aside from the abutments, "on the plan of the one which the said Granger built across Saxtons River at Saxtons River Village and of equally good material as the Brookline bridge

so called" for $6 per running foot. From this it appears that the bridge itself cost $702.

At this time there was also another bridge near by, over Saxtons River on the road to Saxtons River Village. It was approximately where Sabin Bridge, also covered, later stood. The committee recommended that Westminster ought not to have to maintain two bridges so close together and suggested that the Woolley (later Sabin) Bridge be given up. Consequently a road was built along the south side of the river and the Woolley Bridge crossing given up, only to be restored some fifteen years later.

Sabin Bridge

Buffeted by floods and pounded by traffic in the 1930s, Sabin (once called Woolley) Bridge had a decided list to the downstream side, and one end was higher than the other. Guy wires on the upstream side kept the list from getting worse.

Built about 1850, Sabin Bridge was the subject of protracted litigation among Westminster, Rockingham and Grafton. Although it stood on the

SABIN BRIDGE

road from Bellows Falls to Saxtons River, a southward sweep of the road carries into Westminster a few rods—and that is where the legal struggle originated. In 1848 Windham County Court ordered the bridge and approaches built by the town of Westminster and at a town meeting the selectmen were authorized to contract for it. At the same time Westminster pe-

titioned the court to have part of the cost charged against Rockingham, Grafton and Athens on the ground that the bridge was chiefly for the convenience of those towns and would be of little benefit to the inhabitants of Westminster.

The court ruled that Athens would derive no appreciable benefit and ordered the petition against it dismissed. Then the matter was continued from term to term until in 1851 the court appointed commissioners to investigate. After hearings, the commissioners reported in support of Westminster's claim, and decided that of the $1,891 estimated cost, $600 would be a fair share for Rockingham and $150 for Grafton. In the end the two towns paid only slightly more than that.

The bridge was built by John Minard and Ransome Farnsworth. It was 117 feet long and of Town lattice construction. Toward the end of the last century great laminated wooden arches were added for extra strength. With many repairs, the bridge became a heavy expense to the town and in 1941 a new bridge on a slightly higher level—and with straighter approaches—replaced it.

LEWIS BRIDGE

Lewis Bridge

Few Vermont towns retained as many truly ancient covered bridges as Westminster. The Lewis Bridge, which crossed Cobb (or Governor's) Brook on a little-used back road between Westminster and Bellows Falls, was built in 1838.

A Town lattice truss, it crossed high above the little brook and during a century of service it didn't suffer much from high water. Nonetheless it gradually grew weaker. Travelers some years ago testify that it was once, like so many other bridges in the area, well plastered with advertisements.

A Westminster town meeting in 1838 instructed the selectment to build the bridge as replacement for another which apparently had been damaged by a freshet. These worthies entered into a contract with John May and Erastus M. Holton to build the bridge and abutments for $1,500, specifying that it was to be like Granger's (now Gage's) Bridge, and that the shingles were to be "chestnut or hemlock and all the other boards, planks and timbers in and about the bridge to be of good sound hemlock."

Five years later the well-known covered bridge builder, Sanford Granger, entered the picture. High water had washed out and weakened one abutment in 1843 but left Lewis Bridge largely unharmed. Granger was hired to raise the bridge and lengthen it 24 feet (it was originally 41 feet long.) "It is understood," the selectmen's contract with Granger stated, "that the said Granger is not to do any stone nor any work in consequence of high water and we the said Campbell, Silvester and Crowell agree to pay the said Granger 7 dollars and 50 cents per foot for 24 feet added materials for an addition which shall be as good as the old bridge." Thus Granger's pay was $170. Inside the bridge one could see where Granger added his 24 feet, splicing new timbers to old ones with wooden pegs.

In 1953, because of age and neglect, Lewis Bridge had to be replaced by a so-called modern structure.

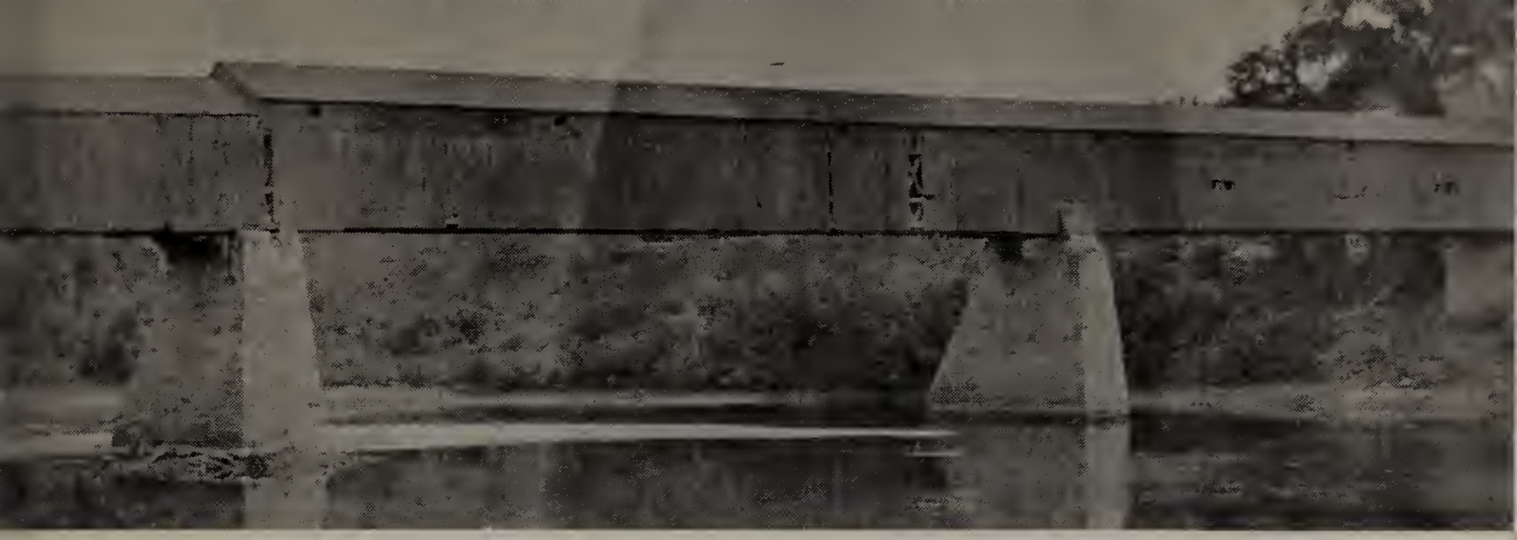
Westminster Earlier Bridges

Westminster has a long and honorable record in bridge building. Its first bridge of consequence was built in 1786 across Saxtons River near its mouth, almost exactly where the Boston & Maine Railroad bridge now stands. It was the first formal river crossing and one of the first spans of importance in the county.

After eleven years high water destroyed this pioneer span, and when a proposal to build another was put to the voters, it was rejected on the ground that the stream could be forded in summer and crossed on the ice in winter.

In 1801 Westminster voted to build another bridge at that location, and raised a 1-cent tax to pay for it. In 1838 this was rebuilt just above the present concrete arch bridge on U.S. Rte. 5. Alvin Dickinson of Putney had the contract to furnish all the lumber—hemlock and pine—for a lattice type covered bridge, the cost of which was $570.

This was the last covered bridge near the mouth of Saxtons River. About 1891 it was replaced by an iron bridge, which in turn gave way to concrete.



WALPOLE BRIDGE

Walpole Bridge

A toll bridge once joined Westminster Station with Walpole, New Hampshire. When successive freshets in 1868 and 1869 wrecked the span on the Vermont side of their property, the toll company directors gave up and sold out to the two towns. The cost of rebuilding was apportioned one third for Vermont and two thirds for New Hampshire.

The free bridge was ready by the fall of 1870, with its western portion slightly smaller than the other two spans. It stood for forty years, then on April 10, 1910, was destroyed by an incendiary. The firebug was given a state prison sentence.

Basin Farm Bridge

Out of sight of Vermont Rte. 121, just south of Bellows Falls, a private bridge once spanned Saxtons River on the Basin Farm owned by Mr. and Mrs. G. P. James.

BASIN FARM BRIDGE

Horace Thompson, Bellows Falls paper manufacturer, had owned this property and built a bridge to reach the good grazing land on the south bank of the stream. Oddly enough he did not employ a local carpenter-contractor, but purchased an entire wooden truss bridge that had once served on a Canadian railroad. Samuel Daggett, a local stonemason, was put to work building abutments at the site. Then he was sent up to Canada to see about shipping the bridge to Bellows Falls. As built over Saxtons River, the queen-post trusses were partially sheathed but not roofed.

Robert Pierce, a later owner, had a tin roof and full siding added to Basin Farm Bridge about 1938. Used only by cows and an occasional tractor, it stood for twenty more years. Weather protection was later neglected, and the bridge developed an ominous sag before at last it crumpled and fell into Saxtons River.

WHITINGHAM

Little is known today of any covered bridges that once stood in Whitingham.

As early as 1818 the voters at March Meeting petitioned the Vermont legislature "to grant a lottery for the purpose of erecting a bridge across Deerfield River near Ira Davis' or Jeremiah Wheelers." Since they were distant from the main valley, residents of the Jacksonville area of Whitingham seemed markedly less enthusiastic about bridging the Deerfield River in the west. In spite of this the river was bridged, and eventually in at least two places.

A wooden structure with high covered wooden trusses (but no roof) served the hamlet of Davis Bridge for many years.

Downstream, in the southwest corner of town, a drowned-out and forgotten post office and railroad station called Sherman was served by a genuine covered bridge. Everything at Sherman was obliterated when the series of electric power reservoirs was constructed on the Deerfield River early in the present century.

WILMINGTON

High Mowing Farm Bridge

High Mowing Farm has long been known to breeders of registered Guernsey cows. Located about a mile and a half to the north of the village of Wilmington, it was the property of the late Arthur D. Pinkham of Wilmington and New York City. Sheep are now raised there.

An unnamed stream, a tiny tributary of the Deerfield River, flows across some of Mr. Pinkham's five hundred acres of well-kept farmland. The owner decided to make a new crossing, using a covered bridge.

Haynes Brothers, Inc. of Wilmington built the bridge in about a month in the fall of 1949, using timber off the farm. Although not a replica, the bridge

HIGH MOWING FARM BRIDGE

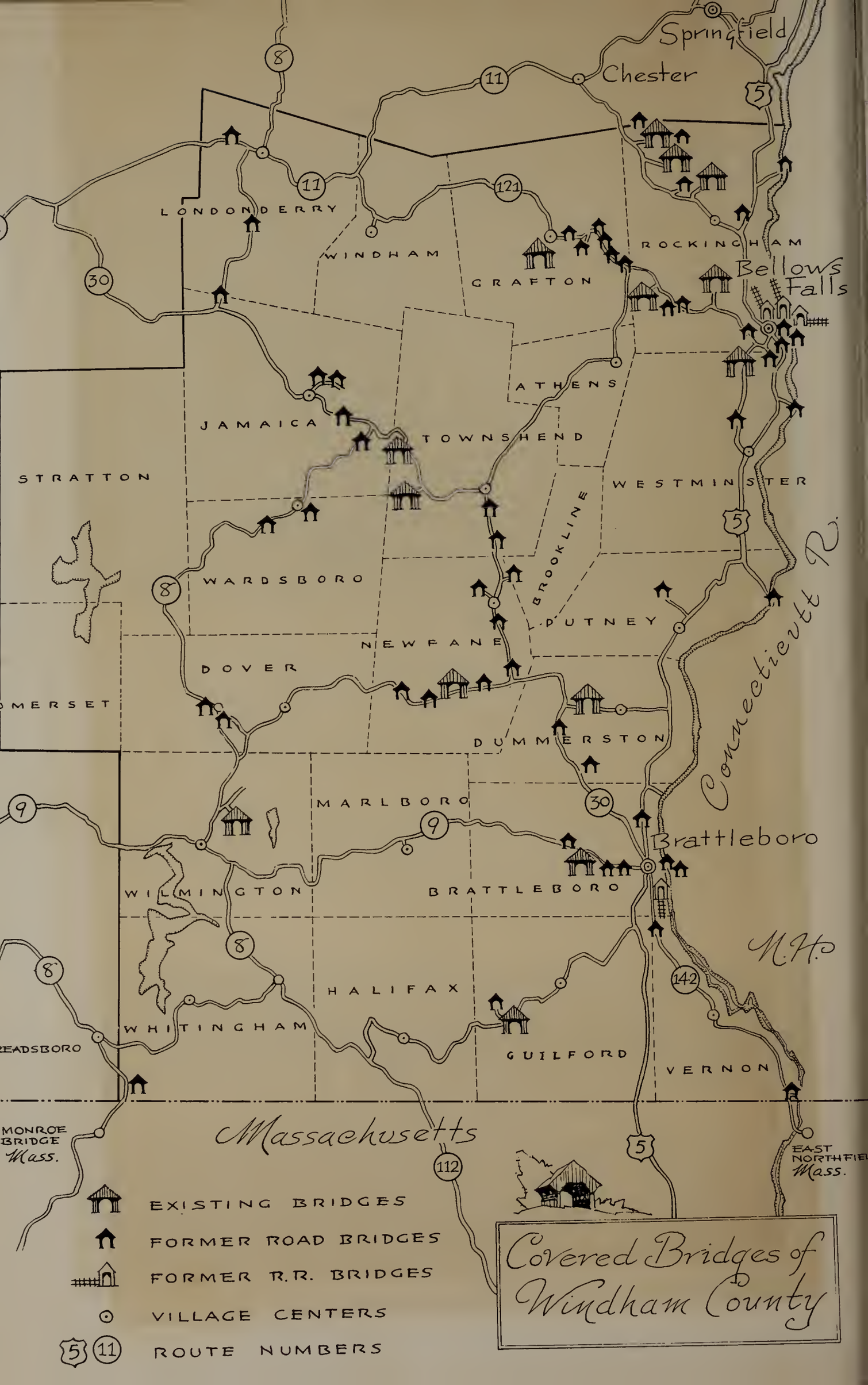
is obviously modeled after the Creamery Bridge in Brattleboro. It is of lattice construction on the tried-and-true Town plan, with two one-inch pins at each of the intersections. Abutments are stone and wood cribbing, and the roof is shingled. The whole bridge is about 22 feet long and 12 feet wide, just big enough for a station wagon or occasional tractor, but mostly for use of some of High Mowing Farm's sheep herd.

Painted a barn red with gray interior, the bridge crosses a dam in the stream behind which there is a little swimming pool bordered by a grove of fir trees. It gives access to fifty acres of mowing and pastureland that has been cleared of rocks and developed in recent years.

THIRD BRATTLEBORO BRIDGE OVER CONNECTICUT

BUT WHY COVERED?

"Keeps 'em dry," an old Pennsylvania carpenter always answered. Not the travelers, not the horses, or the wagonloads of hay, or the sweethearts halted in the fragrant shadows; nor was he referring to the plank roadways of the old landmarks. The roofs were put on our old covered bridges to keep the great main beams and arches dry. Staunch as these supporting timbers are, they rot if left exposed to be alternately wet by rains and snow and then scorched by sun.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